Muhammad (SAW) in the Near-Contemporaneous Non-Muslim Sources: An Appraisal of Robert Spencer's Views

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Abstract:

Muhammad's (SAW life is fully reserved and recorded in history. It has been established beyond a shadow of doubt that not only the major and significant events of his life but even the minutest details of his life are also painstakingly preserved by the Muslims. In spite of the availability of abundant authentic documents concerning Muhammad's (SAW) life, sayings and deeds, some critics of Islam stubbornly refuse to believe in his historicity. Robert Spencer is one such critic who maintains that Muhammad's (SAW) value is nothing more than a fictional or mythological figure. This article is an attempt to prove the existence of Muhammad (SAW) in contemporary non-Muslims sources. The article is divided into three major parts: the first part of the paper throws light on how much emphasis Muslims lay on historical authenticity of Muhammad (SAW), in the second part of the paper views and doubts of prominent like orientalists Spencer concerning Muhammad's (SAW) historical authenticity have been summarized, whereas the third part presents Robert Spencer's views in the same connection and endeavors to refute his views and approach drawing on contemporary non-Muslim Sources.

Muslims strongly believe in the historical authenticity of Muhammad (SAW) as well as his message and uphold historicity as one of the most significant elements for a personality to be regarded as a role model.[1] It is a psychological reality that fictional and mythological characters have but only ephemeral impact on human minds and dispositions.

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The allegedly oldest religion of the world—namely Hinduism, though the claim is not well founded—contains hundreds of characters but none of them can be termed historical in the true sense of the world. The well known amongst them are found in Ramayana and Mahabharata, but the narrative of their lives cannot be termed history. In fact, the very period of composition for these books is shrouded in darkness. Likewise, the founder of Zoroastrianism still continues to remain the cynosure of religious devotion but the account of his life is so obscure and opaque that many skeptic American and European researchers suspect the historical existence of Zoroaster. His place of birth, year of birth, nationality, family, religious teachings, original scriptures and language etc., are wrapped in doubts and mystery.

There is an extreme dearth of trustworthy traditions and mere estimate and conjectures are highly inadequate to dispel the murk around his personality. The same is true about Buddha and even truer about Confucius, although the latter has millions of devotees.[2]

Semitic nations have received hundreds of prophets but nothing is known about some of them except their names and in some cases even their names are buried in the dark recesses of history. The writers of Encyclopedia Britannica admit that Torah was written hundreds of years after the death of Moses. [3] The history of Jesus (peace be upon him) recorded in the Bibles, however, the Christian world after a long process of selection and rejection, awarded validity-recognition to only four of them. The fact is worth noting that none of the authors had met and seen Jesus (peace be upon him). Furthermore, it is not clear as to when and in which language the Bibles were originally written. After thorough analysis of the historical account of Jesus' birth, death, the doctrine of Trinity etc., the American rationalists began to consider him as a mythological and fictional characters resembling the heroes of Greek and Roman mythologies.[4] On the contrary, Muhammad (SAW) emerged in the full light of history.

Robert Spencer's General Views:

According to Spencer, Muhammad (SAW) is supposed to have lived at a certain time and preached certain doctrines that he said God had delivered to him. The veracity of those claims is open, to a certain extent, to historical analysis. [5]

Robert Spencer is reluctant to acknowledge the historicity of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and places him in the category of "legendary and semi-legendary" figures who have galvanized warriors of the past into chivalrous deeds.[6] He does not deny the tremendous of influence of the prophet, but in his view, it does not depend on his having been a historical personage. He maintains that Macbeth is as coherent and compelling a character as Muhammad (SAW). He proceeds to compare the prophet of Islam to Robin Hood whose real adventures and exploits are shrouded in hazy folklores.[7] According to him, the very idea of subjecting the traditional account of Islam to historical scrutiny would be an affront to many Muslims. In my opinion, Muslims advocate such

inquiry as they would never appreciate the idea of basing their doctrines on historically unreliable foundations.

He believes that the traditional narrative of Muhammad (SAW), the Holy Qur'an and the widely accepted account of early Islam cannot bear close historical examination. The particulars of the whole narrative turn out to be more and more elusive on closer and closer inspection.[8]

An exhaustive appraisal of the historical evidences brings astonishing indications that there is much in the stories about Muhammad (peace be upon him) which can be termed mythical but not historical fact. He maintains that the Holy Qur'an does not consist of the revealed message of Muhammad (SAW), it was rather constructed form already existing Judo-Christian as well as some other traditions of the time.[9]

Views of Prominent Orientalists:

Spencer is at odds with Ernest Renan over his claim about Muhammad's (SAW) having lived in the "full light of history" and contrarily insists that the real story of Muhammad (SAW) is not completely revealed. In order to substantiate his view, he quotes views of famous orientalists. Willam Muir (1819-1905) considers some highly revered traditions as "exaggerated and fabulous". Welhausen (1844-1918) is even more skeptical about the traditions and therefore, in his attempt to determine the authenticity of the traditions, he tried to distinguish the trustworthy narrators from the untrustworthy narrators of traditions. Likewise, Aloys Sprenger (1813-1839) too doubted the authenticity of some of the traditions. Another prominent orientalist namely Goldziher (1850-1921) " determined the lateness of hadith collections" and viewed that there was a widespread tendency among Muslims to fabricate stories about Muhammad (peace be upon him) to bolster a political position or a religious practice. Leon Caetani (1869-1935) went so far as to suggest that the traditions contain nothing true and being so they can be discounted as apocryphal. A little lenient in his approach, Henri Lammens (1862-1937) notes the "absence of critical sense" in a widely accepted early biographies of Muhammad (SAW) but rules out the possibility of rejection the whole stuff en bloc. Joseph Schacht (1902-1969) also observed that a number of traditions "even in the classical corpus of hadith" cannot be possibly true. Equally doubtful about the origins of Islam, Johan Wansborough (1928- 2002) postulates that the motivating force behind the idea of developing Qur'an was to establish Islam's origin in Arabia and similarly traditions were concocted to provide the Arabian Empire its distinctive faith so as to promote and maintain its unity and stability. [10]

However , it is noteworthy that such extreme opinions have been considerably alleviated by the availability of some new " pre-canonical'' sources to which eminent scholars like Joseph Schacht did not have access. Peter Webbb, commenting on the robust and resilient nature of the Islamic traditions remarks: "Over the past century, the Muslim tradition has been challenged by many academics and it has proven remarkably resilient in its defence". He adds that the Muslim narrative of history, the integrity of the holy Quran and the mnemonic

value of the Islamic traditions are so robust that few researchers would contend that the whole narrative was fabricated. He advises the researchers to adopt a sensitive and careful attitude towards the Arabic sources, rather than quitting them in craze for re-writing a sensational account of history.[11] Robert Hoyland considers the historical memory of Muslims as more tenacious than some writers have claimed. He concludes that claims such as Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not exist, Mecca was originally located at a different place , the holy Qur'an was not revealed in Arabic etc., can never be verified. Harald Motzki regards the early prophetic traditions as a useful and trustworthy source of studying Islam. After his thorough perusal of Musannaf of Abd al-Razzaq, he discarded the theory advocated by Goldzehir and Schacht who looked upon the collections of hadiths as historically unreliable sources.[12]

Robert Spencer casts doubts on the early origins of Islam and asserts that there is no historical evidence for Islamic narrative. He quotes non-Islamic sources to defend his notion though his claim remains untenable even in the light early non-Islamic sources, let alone in the light of highly trustworthy Islamic sources.

Doctirna Jacobi:

The earliest of all non-Muslim sources that mentions the appearance of a prophet is Doctirna Jacobi which dates back to 634 A.D., written only two years after the sad demise of Muhammad (SAW):

"When the *candidatus* [that is, a member of the Byzantine imperial guard] was killed by the Saracens *[Sarakenoi]*, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying "the candidatus has been killed," and we Jews were overjoyed. And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures and I said to him: "What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?" He replied, groaning deeply: "He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive the Antichrist. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared." So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.

It appears necessary to explain that Islam allows bloodshed of those people who indulge in exploiting and persecuting the helpless and the innocent. Islam raises sword for the annihilation of oppression and exploitative regime and therefore such a sword is regarded as a key to paradise. The prophet of Islam earnestly used sword for such a sublime purpose and pointed out:

أَنَّ السُّيوفَ مَفَاتِيحُ الْجَنَّةِ

Verily, swords are the keys to paradise [13]

A Record Of The Arab Conquest Of Syria, 637 CE / 15-16 AH:

According to Wright, the fragment seems to be an almost "contemporary notice".[14] The same view was endorsed by Nöldeke as well.[15] It is worth noting that the fragmentary condition of the text renders the it unclear and ambiguous. Therefore, the lacunae are filled in square brackets.

"... and in January, they took the word for their lives (did) [the sons of] Emesa [i.e., Ḥimṣ)], and many villages were ruined with killing by [the Arabs of] Muḥammad and a great number of people were killed and captives [were taken] from Galilee as far as Bēth [...] and those Arabs pitched camp beside [Damascus?] [...] and we saw everywhe[re...] and o[l]ive oil which they brought and them. And on the t[wenty six]th of May went S[ac[ella]rius]... cattle [...] [...] from the vicinity of Emesa and the Romans chased them [...] and on the tenth [of August] the Romans fled from the vicinity of Damascus [...] many [people] some 10,000. And at the turn [of the ye]ar the Romans came; and on the twentieth of August in the year nine [hundred and forty-]seven there gathered in Gabitha [...] the Romans and great many people were ki[lled of] [the R]omans, [s]ome fifty thousand [...]"[16]

According to Spencer, the discussion held between the Christian patriarch John I and Amr Ibn al-As in 639 does not refer to the Arabian Commander and his followers as Muslims; they are rather referred to as " Hagarians" and " Mhaggraye". Neither of the interlocutors makes any mention of Muhammad, Islam or Qur'an, hence they are later fabrications.[17] But Jan Restö , in his book The Arabs of Antiquity, writes that an extant Syriac letter written around 640 AD reports a colloquy between the patriarch Johannes and Amr bin Aas, the Conqueror of Egypt. In this letter, the Muslims are repeatedly called Mahgaraye and Islam is presented as the " law of the Mahgaraye".[18]

Thomas The Presbyter (Writing *c*. 640 CE / 19 AH):

The contents of this manuscript have puzzled many scholars for their apparent lack of coherence as it contains an assembly of texts of diverse nature.[19] This manuscript contains statement of two significant dates which are categorically related to Islam and Muslims

AG 945, indiction VII: "On Friday, 4 February, [i.e., 634 CE / *Dhul Qa'dah* 12 AH] at the ninth hour, there was a battle between the Romans and the Arabs of Muḥammad [Syr. *tayyāyē d-Mḥmt*] in Palestine twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled, leaving behind the atrician *YRDN* (Syr. *BRYRDN*), whom the Arabs killed. Some 4000 poor villagers of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The Arabs ravaged the whole region."

Spencer stubbornly refuses to acknowledge this explicit reference to Muhammad (SAW) and observes that the word Mhmt is not a proper noun; it may have

meant the "praised one" or "chosen one" without any definitely known referent. In other words, the Mhmt of Thomas has nothing to do with the prophet of Islam except name.[20]

AG 947, indiction IX: "The Arabs invaded the whole of Syria and went down to Persia and conquered it; the Arabs climbed mountain of Mardin and killed many monks there in [the monasteries of] Kedar and Benōthō. There died the blessed man Simon, doorkeeper of Qedar, brother of Thomas the priest."[21]

It is the first date above which is of great importance as it provides the first unequivocal reference to Muhammad in a non-Muslim source. The account is usually identified with the battle of Dathin.[22] According to Hoyland, "its precise dating inspires confidence that it ultimately derives from first-hand knowledge".[23]This means that the time period between the death of Muhammad (June, 632 CE) and the earliest mention of him (4th February, 634 CE) is hardly over a year and half.

It is no wonder that the "historical Jesus" also suffered the same treatment at the hand of polytheists, Jews and Romans. According to Jews, he was a magician who bewitched Israel into idolatry. They further add that he was stoned to death and hanged on tree for his wrongs.[24] The Talmudic Jews believed that he would ultimately enter hell and burn in the boiling excrement for ridiculing the words of pious sages.[25] Jesus (peace be upon him) is accused of false prophecy, sorcery and even sexual impropriety. It is obvious that this portrayal of Jesus (peace be upon him) is not completely different but also diametrically opposite to the image presented by his early followers. It is, therefore, an undesirable approach to study a historical personality in the light of the accounts provided by adversaries.

Sebeos, Bishop of the Bagrantunis (Writing in 660sCE/ 40s AH):

Sebeos, bishop of the Bagratunis, provides an intriguing account of the events that came to pass in the seventh century. It appears that Sbeos lived through the events that he narrates. He concludes with Mu'awiya's (RA) victory in the Arab Civil War (656-61CE) which implies that he was writing soon after the aforesaid event. He is the first non-Muslim writer presenting a theory for the victorious emergence of Islam that pays heed to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing.[26] He has the following remarks about Muhammad (SAW):

> "At that time a certain man from along those same sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet [i.e., Muḥammad], a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learnt and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from a high and upon a single order they all came together

in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So, Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: 'With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Ismael. But now you are the sons of Abraham and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize the land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you."[27]

The following verses of the holy Qur'an that Muhammad (SAW) laid stress on following the religion of Abraham (peace be upon him):

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ. وَمَنْ يَرْغَبُ عَنْ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدِ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ.

"Our Lord, send among these people a messenger who would recite to them your verses and teach them the book and wisdom and purify them (spiritually)."

"And who will be opposed to the religion of Abraham except one who makes idiot of himself. And We had selected him in this world, and verily he would be among the pious in the Hereafter."[28]

Sebeos clearly states that Muhammad legislated the law banning carrion. The same we find the holy Qur'an:[29]

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَامِ ذَلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ الْيَوْمَ يَئِسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرَ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ.

"Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah , and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through

divining arrows. That is grave disobedience. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Likewise, he mentions the prohibition of wine which can be read in the following verses of the holy Qur'an:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ.

"They ask you regarding wine and gambling. Tell (them), "and them is great sin and [yet, some] benefits for people. But their sin is greater than their benefits. And they ask you about what they should spend. Say, "the excess [left after your needs]. Thus Allah makes clears his verses to you so that you may contemplate."[30]

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ.

"O you who believed, verily intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone alters (to other than Allah), and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful."[31]

Sebeos points out the Muhammad (SAW) prohibited falsehood. The holy Qur'an condemns falsehood in the following verses:

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمُ الْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ.

"And do not say about what your tongues assert of falsehood, "this is lawful and this is unlawful, to invent falsehood about Allah. Verily those who invent falsehood about Allah will not succeed."[32]

He further points out that Muhammad (SAW) forbade forcination. The holy Qur'an prohibits adultery in the following verses:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزِّنَا إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

"And do not go near impermissible sexual intercourse. Verily, it is ever an immorality land is an evil path".[33]

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.

" The fornicator and the fornicatress—lash each of them with a hundred whips, and don not be taken by sympathy for them in the religion of Allah, if you have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And let a group of Muslims (observers) witness their punishment."[34]

More importantly, it shows that early muslims adhered to a religion that had definite practices and beliefs and was clearly distinct from other currently existing faiths.

A Chronicler of Khuzistan (Writing C.660s CE / 40s AH):

This short and anonymous Nestorian chronicle provides an account of the church and secular histories from the death of Hormizd son of Khusrau to the decline of the Persian kingdom. Due to its anonymity, the document has been termed by the research scholars as Chronicler of Khuzistan. It is so named after its probable geographical location. It succinctly describes the Muslim invasion:

"Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, [numerous] as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader (*mdabbrānā*) was Muḥammad (*mḥmd*). Neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians. Yazdgird sent against them countless troops, but the Arabs routed them all and even killed Rustam. Yazdgird shut himself up in the walls of Mahoze and finally escaped by flight. He reached the country of the Huzaye and Mrwnaye, where he ended his life. The Arabs gained control of Mahoze and all the territory. They also came to Byzantine territory, plundering and ravaging the entire region of Syria. Heraclius, the Byzantine king, sent armies against them, but the Arabs killed more than 100,000 of them."[35]

In short, it presents Muhammad (SAW) as the leader of the sons of Ishmael, whom God raised against the Persians.

Johan Bar Penkaye (Writing 687CE /67-68 AH):

Not much is known about John bar Penkaye. He was a native of Fenek in north-western Mesopotamia and a resident of the monastery of John Kamul. He penned Ktābā *d-rīš mellē* ("Book of the Salient Points") in the monastery and dedicated it to a person known as Sabrisho‘, the Abbott of this convent.[36] In his book John bar Penkaye penned the history of the world from Creation to his

present day which he phrased as the "severe chastisement of today".[37]His work aims to treat the significant events of history with tremendous brevity. In his chronicle Penkaye discusses the Arab conquests and the awfully ruinous famine and plague (686/67 CE). About Muhammad (SAW) he says:

> “ Having let their dispute run its course, after much fighting had taken place between them, the Westerners, whom they call the sons of ’Ammāyē, gained the victory, and one of their number, a man called M‘awyā [i.e., Mu‘awiya], became king controlling the two kingdoms, of the Persians and of the Byzantines. Justice flourished in his time, and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted. For they held, as I have said above, an ordinance, stemming from the man who was their guide (*mhaddyānā*), concerning the people of the Christians and concerning the monastic station. Also as a result of this man's guidance (*mhaddyānūtā*) they held to the worship of One God, in accordance with the customs of ancient law. In the beginning they kept to the traditions (*mašlmānūtā*) of Muhammad, who was their instructor (*tā’rā*), to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against his laws.”[38]

The last line of the above excerpt refers to the following verse of the holy Qur’an:

إِنَّمَا جَزَاءُ الَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا أَنْ يُقَتَّلُوا أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوا
أَوْ تُقَطَّعَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ أَوْ يُنْفَوْا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ ذَلِكَ لَهُمْ خِزْيٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

> *“Surly, the penalty for those who fight against Allah and His Messenger and endeavor upon earth to spread corruption is none but they be killed or crucified or that their hand and feet be amputated from opposite sides or that they be banished from the land. That is their ignominy in this world; and for them there will be a great punishment in the Hereafter*.”[39]

John bar Penkaye presented Muhammad as the "guide" and "instructor" whose "traditions" and "laws" the Arabs fiercely upheld. The term "tradition" (Syr. *mašlmānūtā*) implies that something is handed down, which suggests that

the muslims adhered to and enforced the example of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).[40]

The holy Qur'an presents Muhammad (SAW) as a perfect role model for humanity:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

"There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for you."[41]

In addition, Muhammad (SAW) himself asked his followers to his 'traditions' and 'laws':

لاَ أُلْفِيَنَّ أَحَدَكُمْ مُتَّكِئًا عَلَى أَرِيكَتِهِ يَأْتِيهِ الأَمْرُ مِنْ أَمْرِى مِمَّا أَمَرْتُ بِهِ أَوْ نَهَيْتُ عَنْهُ فَيَقُولُ لاَ نَدْرِى مَا وَجَدْنَا فِى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ اتَّبَعْنَاهُ–

"I should not find anyone amongst you, reclining on his couch, and when my commands or prohibition reaches he says, ' I don't know, we follow only what we find in the Qur'an."[42]

Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem who turned the city over to the caliph Umar after the Arabian conquest in 637 lamented the advent of "the Saracens who, on account of our sins have now risen up against us unexpectedly and ravage all with cruel and feral design, with impious and godless audacity."10 In a Christmas sermon in 634, Sophronius declares that "we, however, because of our innumerable sins and serious misdemeanours, are unable to see these things and are prevented from entering Bethlehem by way of the road. Unwillingly, indeed, contrary to our wishes, we are required to stay at home not bound closely by bodily bonds but bound by fear of the Saracens." He laments that "as one of the Philistines, so now the army of the godless Saracens has captured the divine Bethlehem and bars our passage there, threatening slaughter and destruction if we leave this holy city and dare to approach our beloved and sacred Bethlehem."[43]

They are termed godless as they did not consider Jesus (peace be upon him) as God whereas Christians regard him as the son of God and a fundamental person of the trinity. The holy Qur'an sheds light on these themes in the following verses:

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمِّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ۔

"And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah ?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I

do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen."[44]

Contrary to the Christian doctrines, Islam holds that Jesus (peace be upon him) asked his followers to worship God alone. He who worships any deity, phenomenon of nature or prophet etc., he commits an act of heinous polytheism and is debarred from entering paradise.

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

"They have certainly disbelieved who say, "Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary" while the Messiah has said, "O Children of Israel, worship Allah , my Lord and your Lord." Indeed, he who associates others with Allah - Allah has forbidden him Paradise, and his refuge is the Fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers".[45]

Jesus (peace be upon) always emphasized his being prophet of God and never referred to himself as a God.

قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ آتَانِيَ الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا

"[Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet."[46]

The same theme is emphasized in the following verse as well:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ۔

It is not surprising that a seventh-century Christian like Sophronius would refer to the invaders as "godless."[47]

In all his discussion of the "Saracens," Sophronius shows some familiarity with their disdain for the cross and the orthodox Christian doctrines of Christ, but he never calls the invaders "Muslims" and never refers to Muhammad, the Qur'an, or Islam.

Sophronius sees the Saracens as the instrument of God's wrath against Christians who have grown lax although he describes the Saracens themselves are "God-hating" and "God-fighters," and their unnamed leader as the "devil." It is unclear whether Sophronius refers to the devil himself or to the caliph Umar, who conquered Jerusalem, or to Muhammad or to someone else.[48]

That is why the vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monastries, oppose the Byzantine armies arrayed against them, and in fighting raise up the trophies [of war] and add victory after victory.[49]

In Doctrina Jacobi (635 CE), it is written: "I having arrived at Sykamia, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures, and I said to him : what can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?" . It

refers to the prophet of Islam. But Robert observes that prophet mentioned in Doctrina Jacobi is still alive whereas according to Islamic sources the prophet was supposed to have passed away in 632 CE. Referring to the following verse of the holy Qur'an, Spencer further maintains that the prophet is presented as the Saracen prophet but not as the prophet of Allah as mentioned in the holy Qur'an.[50]

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا۔

> *"Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets. And ever is Allah , of all things, Knowing*."[51]

Though it is a valid objection, yet it can be contended that the writer of Doctrina Jacobi might have remained ignorant about the death of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) because of being far away from the centre of Islam and exactly due to the same reason, he termed him as the prophet of Saracens, not the prophet of Allah. Spencer maintains that at the height of Arabian conquest, not only non-Muslim sources remain silent about Muhammad (SAW) but so the Muslim ones.[52] During the last decades of the Umayyed dynasty , the term 'Arabs' used for the Muslims began to appear in the Graeco-Latin texts. John of Damascus (dead C. 750) still called them Ishma'elites and Saracens. But his contemporary Iohannes Monachus, writing in the reign of Hishm (724-743) calls them " godless Arabs" [53]

In a nutshell, it is an unfair and illogical approach to insist on searching Muhammad (SAW) and Islam in non-Muslim sources in the presence of highly authentic Islamic sources but in spite of that such a search does not lead us to frustration regarding the existence of Muhammad (SAW). The above discussion proves the existence of Muhammad (SAW) in non-Muslims source in which he is either explicitly mentioned or impliedly referred to. Therefore, it is unfair and inappropriate to ask "Did Muhammad Exist?", and it is more rational and fair to believe that Muhammad (SAW) did exist.

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